

NEWS BRIEFING

ASSISTANT SECRETARY ARTHUR SYLVESTER

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The Pentagon

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6:15 P.M.

October 26, 1962

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MR. SYLVESTER: I have here the answers to some of the questions that have developed during the day. We have no new information of our own other than the material in response to questions which have been put in. One of the questions asked:

What was the cargo with which the MARUCLA was "loaded to capacity"?

The boarding officer has reported that inspection reveals the MARUCLA carried general cargo as listed on its manifest. It included sulphur, asbestos, newsprint paper, emery paper, lathes and automotive parts.

Were members of the Navy boarding party armed and with what?

The boarding party was not armed. The arming of the officers and the boat's crew is normally left to the discretion of the commanding officer of the visiting vessel.

Three, how many Navy personnel constitute a normal boarding party?

Since this is left to the discretion of the officer, I can't tell you. We don't know.

Havana radio reports that the first ship which arrived since the quarantine was instituted was named the VANNITSA. How did this ship get through the naval blockade?

I have no comment on Havana radio reports.

Have any arrangements yet been made to get press people either to Guantanamo or to some of the ships enforcing the quarantine? When do you expect to have this problem solved?

I hold in my hand a piece of paper which has a program related to what the capabilities of CINCLANT are. Tomorrow we are going to invite in representatives of the main and basic interested news media to go over this plan and hear their comments on it, whether they can live with it, whether they can't, etc. When that is done, and we have mediated their comments on it, we will then have a plan. We will then be ready as soon as the word is given to go. We should be in that state by noon tomorrow.

QUESTION: Ready to go tomorrow?

MR. SYLVESTER: We should be in the state of having heard from the media representatives, their reactions to this, their understanding of what we can do and what we can't do. In other words, what the resources are, how they see this is going to affect the media representatives, any ideas they have to improve it, any omissions from it. Obviously they, like us, are going to be guided by what the resources are.

QUESTION: Will you tell us what the maximum number of people is?

MR. SYLVESTER: I am not going to discuss here what the plan is.

QUESTION: Are you going to invite the representatives of the foreign correspondents to this discussion tomorrow?

MR. SYLVESTER: That will come out tomorrow. I am not going to discuss it now. The media representatives will be invited. Nobody here in this room will have any quarrel about them. They will be fellows experienced in this field who have seen this sort of operation before.

QUESTION: Have you finished, Arthur?

MR. SYLVESTER: Not quite. It will be in the hands of a committee -- Mr. Splitt, Mr. Robert Harvey, Mr. Norman Hatch, and others. They will set up the meeting. We have not set the time.

The purpose of it is to read into it the views of the people who are going to have to work with it. It will be a representative group of fellows who are professionally competent as yourselves. Personally, I would not volunteer for it.

QUESTION: Why?

MR. SYLVESTER: Because, when you go back to your friends they are going to ask you, didn't you do this, that or the other thing.

What was the name of the ship or ships which intercepted the tanker BUCHAREST? What was the name of the commander or commanders? The Soviet tanker BUCHAREST was intercepted by the United States destroyer GEARING, commanded by Commander Thomas W. Lyons of 130 Emery Street, Portland, Maine. About two hours after the GEARING challenged the BUCHAREST, she was joined on the scene by the NEWPORT NEWS, the flagship of Vice Admiral A. G. Ward, Commander, Second Fleet, and Commander, Task Force 136, and her accompanying destroyers, the LAWRENCE, W. KEITH and the MACDONOUGH.

QUESTION: NEWPORT NEWS flagship of what?

MR. SYLVESTER: NEWPORT NEWS, flagship of Vice Admiral A. G. Ward, Commander, Second Fleet and Commander, Task Force 136.

QUESTION: Is that a cruiser?

ADMIRAL MCCAIN: Yes, it is.

MR. SYLVESTER: The NEWPORT NEWS is commanded by Captain Robert H. Bowers, 124 Charles Street, Annapolis, Maryland. The Commander of the KEITH is Commander C. L. Tyler, 622 Condor Avenue, Norfolk, Virginia. The Commander of the LAWRENCE is Commander T. W. F. Frank Walsh, 7012 Leesville Boulevard, North Springfield, Virginia.

QUESTION: Did you give the commander of the MACDONOUGH?

MR. SYLVESTER: MACDONOUGH's commander is not here. I will have to get it.

How did the JOSEPH P. KENNEDY happen to be available so handily to make the first intercept?

The JOSEPH P. KENNEDY did not "happen to be available" to make the first intercept. She and the PIERCE were the two destroyers closest to the MARUCLA.

What military service is flying the reconnaissance missions over Cuba?

United States military aircraft.

Have any of the reconnaissance aircraft been fired upon?  
Any hit?

No to both questions. That is the extent of my contributions.

MORE

QUESTION: Art, can you tell us why we have to wait until now to get these things? Apparently the details on the events yesterday must certainly have been in your hands a lot earlier than six o'clock?

MR. SYLVESTER: Did you want me not to give them?

QUESTION: I am asking you why they were held until now?

MR. SYLVESTER: They are available now for the first time to me.

QUESTION: In refusing to comment on the VINNITSA thing, is it your story that the BUCHAREST and MARUCLA are the only two ships that we have intercepted?

MR. SYLVESTER: I have no comment on the Havana report.

QUESTION: Did you get a handle on the 25 so-called?

MR. SYLVESTER: No, I didn't. I am still trying.

QUESTION: There was a question there about what planes fly over Cuba. Do you mean to say our planes fly over Cuba?

MR. SYLVESTER: We have put out reconnaissance pictures of Cuba from the air.

QUESTION: Art, do you know the nationality of the crew of the Lebanese ship?

MR. SYLVESTER: No, we haven't gotten that yet.

QUESTION: In the future can we have these details handled by somebody else, or put up on the bulletin board or something, because it slows down this briefing. It comes at a very tense time for some of us.

MR. SYLVESTER: If you would like it on the bulletin board, I will be happy to put it on the bulletin board.

QUESTION: Isn't it possible to get incidents of this kind that happened during the day as you get them instead of saving it?

MR. SYLVESTER: Glad to. If you would like it that way, piece by piece, we will be glad to.

QUESTION: What is scheduled for the weekend? Are we going to have two briefings tomorrow and Sunday?

MR. SYLVESTER: We will be here. If there is material to give out I will give it out. I will be available twice a day if you wish.

QUESTION: Is there any tonight?

MR. SYLVESTER: I don't foresee it.

QUESTION: Do you foresee a lid on this and, if so, approximately when?

MR. SYLVESTER: I would say I would hope the lid can go on. You can put it on now as far as I am concerned. In the event something should blow up, we will be prepared to release it.

QUESTION: You mean if something of vital importance happens there won't be any lid?

MR. SYLVESTER: Right.

QUESTION: Can you give us approximately when you will have briefings tomorrow?

MR. SYLVESTER: I will try to have it in the mid-morning. We will make ourselves available whether we have anything or not.

QUESTION: Can you comment on the possibility of attack on the missile base?

MR. SYLVESTER: No, I can't. By whom?

QUESTION: By the United States. Some Congressmen have been forecasting there will be some bombing of these missile sites to get them out.

MR. SYLVESTER: We are where we were yesterday. I will not comment.

QUESTION: You said the boarding party was not armed?

MR. SYLVESTER: That is right.

QUESTION: Why can't we know how many people were in on the party?

MR. SYLVESTER: There is no intention that you can't know. We haven't been able to get the number yet.

QUESTION: In flying over Cuba, are we in violation of air space in that sense?

MR. SYLVESTER: I wouldn't have any idea.

QUESTION: Art, are we still flying over Cuba today? Are there any flights?

MR. SYLVESTER: The situation is the same as it has been. We are flying, we are maintaining continuous surveillance.

QUESTION: You are describing planes that flew over yesterday. You are talking about planes yesterday. You haven't said anything about today?

MR. SYLVESTER: I have not said anything about today. I have no report whether we are flying today or not. I have said we are maintaining continuous surveillance. I do not know whether we have made any surveillance today.

QUESTION: Could we ask that as a question and you can look it up?

MR. SYLVESTER: You can ask it, yes.

QUESTION: What happened to the 12 ships that changed course?

MR. SYLVESTER: We have no idea where they are going but we just know they are not going to Cuba.

QUESTION: Will the people involved in this operation become eligible for that new medal, so called Cold War Medal?

MR. SYLVESTER: I haven't any idea. I will try to find out.

QUESTION: The way it is written does not look that way.

MR. SYLVESTER: We will look at it.

QUESTION: Do you have anything to add to the statement by Linc White and Pierre Salinger about the continuing build-up?



MR. SYLVESTER: No.

QUESTION: Is there a continuing build up?

MR. SYLVESTER: The statement that Mr. Salinger made covers it.

QUESTION: When do you assume we will be signing up for this Caribbean duty?

MR. SYLVESTER: Not before the morning anyway.

QUESTION: It has been noticed that Mr. Salinger's statement on missile build up is pretty much a duplication of what you said last night and of what Lincoln White said at the State Department this afternoon. There is a tremendous interest in restating what has already been stated. Could you state what the significance is?

MR. SYLVESTER: I am afraid you will have to ask Mr. Salinger.

QUESTION: Are there any Army, Navy or Marine Corps officers assigned to Admiral Ward's staff? Are there officers of other services at sea with him?

MR. SYLVESTER: I will have to find out for you.

We have the name of the commander of the MACDONOUGH. The Commanding Officer of the MACDONOUGH is Commander William G. Hurley, 5406 Wilson Lane, Bethesda, Maryland.

QUESTION: Art, do I understand you to say there have been only two intercepts so far?

MR. SYLVESTER: The only two intercepts that I know about.

QUESTION: Are any more intercepts expected soon at all?

MR. SYLVESTER: I have no knowledge now of any immediate intercepts.

QUESTION: Have you rescheduled that PHIBBRIGLEX landing?

MR. SYLVESTER: Not today.

QUESTION: When do you think it will be rescheduled?

MR. SYLVESTER: I only know what Navy reported at the time. I don't think it will be rescheduled today or tomorrow.

QUESTION: Were Ward's flagship and the destroyer present at the time these two ships were allowed to go by? You said it was about two hours after sighting?

MR. SYLVESTER: The Navy information is that about two hours after the GEARING challenged the BUCHAREST she was joined by this list of vessels that I named.

QUESTION: Does that mean they were still with the Russian tanker or after?

MR. SYLVESTER: I would think it is quite clear what it meant, what it stated.

QUESTION: Where was the BUCHAREST at that point?

MR. SYLVESTER: I have forgotten the plotting of it. I can get it for you.

QUESTION: I think what we are trying to get at was whether the BUCHAREST was still on the scene when Admiral Ward showed up.

ADMIRAL McCAIN: The answer is "no" on that thing, Mr. Sylvester.

MR. SYLVESTER: Negative.

QUESTION: Has there been any change in the restriction of the dependents or possible evacuation of dependents?

MR. SYLVESTER: No change.

THE PRESS: Thank you, Art.